

Senator Slap, Representative Elliott, and Members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee,

My name is Susan Lounsbury and I am a Mathematics Professor and discipline coordinator at Tunxis Community College and a Simsbury resident.

I am writing today to testify in support of HB 5300, *An Act Requiring Legislative Approval For the Merger or Closing of Institutions Within the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities and Prohibiting the Consolidation of the Regional-Technical Colleges*. This bill provides necessary legislative oversight of any merger within the CSCU System, a power that the Legislature used to hold. Oversight is needed because the people who are making decisions about what is best for our students and the curriculum we teach should be those who are directly working with our students. This is not what is happening with this merger.

I have been teaching at Tunxis since 2006 and I have taught all levels of Mathematics from Developmental through Calculus. I have worked with many different students: from those just out of high school to senior citizens. I have worked with veterans, homeless students, students who are food insecure, those who love math and those that hate math or are afraid of it. The community college mission of open enrollment and to educate all regardless of circumstances is what drew me to community college teaching. Community colleges are supposed to meet students where they are and get them where they are going.

There are many things that trouble me about this merger, but the most troubling is the reduction and cheapening of developmental education options for our students. In 2019, the system hired the Charles A Dana center and formed a committee to look at the alignment and completion of Math and English (ACME). I was invited to attend. I went to the meeting to find out more, but it became apparent that decisions had already been made and our presence was more valuable than our input. I withdrew from the committee, along with many others. It is interesting to note that we are all listed as participating in this process in the NECHE report, yet when the final recommendations came out from those who were left at the table, the system office picked only those the Dana center had pushed from the beginning. I also am a member of the Connecticut Mathematics Advisory Council (CMAC), which has math representatives from every community college and each state university, and when we expressed our concerns about many of the proposals, we were mostly ignored.

From the mathematics perspective, not only will this proposal eliminate all stand-alone developmental courses but also our first credit level course. Every student will be placed into a course one level higher than our current college level as well as a co-requisite support course. I teach many of these classes that are going to be eliminated as well as the upper levels. I work with these students on a daily basis and throwing them into a course that is above their ability level while trying to catch them up at the same time is a recipe for disaster. The BOR will cite data from other schools showing this corequisite model works, but the model they are mandating is not the same as those in the studies they cite. They are comparing apples and oranges. They are also misinterpreting much of the data, which is even more ironic given that they are proposing this to mathematics faculty.

Even more maddening is their claim that this is about equity when they will be throwing our most vulnerable students into the deep end of the pool without a life jacket. Many of my students already question whether they are “college material” and putting them in classes where they will struggle to catch up from day one will not make them more confident.

My Tunxis colleagues and I had already begun to work on this same problem back in 2017. We partnered with our colleagues at Central Connecticut State University (CCSU) to create a pathway for non-STEM students that would allow them to complete two college level math courses at Tunxis and have all 6 credits transfer. Now, with this new ACME mandate we will not be allowed to offer the first of these classes. The merger will thus undermine the very thing that the BOR claims to do—put students first.

I have tried time and again to speak up and to participate and have my voice and those of my colleagues heard but the BOR is turning a deaf ear to us. They are not listening to students or to the people who are directly working with students. They are not being above board in the substantive change document that has been submitted to NECHE. I believe that oversight is needed. Thank you for your time and willingness to look at this.